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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 000363

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KFLU](#) [TBIO](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [BA](#)
SUBJECT: BAHRAIN RESPONDS TO H1N1 CASES

Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: Bahraini authorities announced eleven confirmed cases of H1N1 June 15 and 16. The patients had all recently returned from a youth exchange program in the U.S. Health Authorities have collected additional samples from patient contacts for testing. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On June 15, the Bahraini Ministry of Health announced that seven out of 13 students who had returned from Washington D.C. on "an Education Ministry-sponsored trip" the evening of June 13 had tested positive for H1N1. On June 16th, the MOH reported that two additional students, as well as two siblings, had also tested positive, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 11. The students were returning from an exchange arranged by the USG-funded Youth and Exchange Study (YES) program, though this has not yet appeared in media.

¶3. (U) Doctors at the government's Salmaniya Hospital tell us that they have contacted passengers who were on the same flight and others who have been in contact with the students, and have collected test samples. Results should be available on June 16 or 17.

¶4. (U) Bahrain's first H1N1 case) a lone student who had just returned from the U.S. (with no USG connections)) was reported in media on May 26. The student was quarantined and recovered. That case evoked moderate public interest; the new June 15-16 cases have generated considerably more public concern.

¶5. (U) All local dailies are reporting on the H1N1 cases in Bahrain. Bloggers have also commented, calling for a halt to all travel between the United States and Bahrain and criticizing the H1N1 screening procedures used in American and European airports. An editorial in the English language Gulf Daily News also questioned the effectiveness of the H1N1 screening at Bahrain International Airport.

GOB Response

¶6. (C) In published reports, MOH Under Secretary Abdul Aziz Hamza stated that the government had moved to Phase 6 (global) of the Pandemic Flu Plan it adopted in 2006--Phase 6 being the first stage after "pandemic alert" and declaring a pandemic in progress. Dr. Muna Al Musawi, director of the MOH's disease control section, told EconOff that domestically, Bahrain had moved to Phase 4 (internal) - "Pandemic Alert" but would start exercising some Phase 6 protocols due to the heavy travel summer holiday season.

¶7. (C) Dr. Mahmood Al Tahoo, a physician at Salmaniya Hospital where all the infected patients are presently quarantined, told EconOff that the GOB is preparing for a significant increase in the number of H1N1 patients. He said that his hospital has already collected over 110 nasal swabs

from people who had proximate contact with the infected students, and that they should have results June 16 or 17. (NOTE: In meetings with medical personnel from the U.S. Navy's NAVCENT headquarters in Bahrain, MOH officials said that their testing staff were all trained by Naval Medical Research Unit-3, Cairo, and use the CDC's rRT-PCR H1N1 kits for testing. END NOTE.) All those who have been tested but have not shown any symptoms have been given Tamiflu and sent home with instruction to limit their activities. Tahoe said that a team of ten doctors have already been organized to provide a 24-hour/day presence at the International Airport(in shifts), and MOH officials are identifying doctors at the hospital to open an off-site, stand-alone testing and quarantine facility as needed.

18. (C) Comment: Bahraini health authorities appear to be dealing with the public health aspects of these latest H1N1 cases in an appropriate manner. The GOB may find it more challenging to handle the public relations fallout; so will we if/when the USG's involvement in the exchange becomes public knowledge.

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